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ABSTRACT

The relationship of racial group concepts (racial preference and racial attitudes) to general and specific self-esteem in black children was examined in this study. A secondary purpose of this study was to assess the validity of Nobles' (1973) theory that racial group attitudes influence the black American's concept of "self." The subjects were 210 black children in grades three to six. A black experimenter administered (1) a variation of the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI) to measure general and specific self-esteem, and (2) a variation of the Preschool Racial Attitude Measure II (PRAM II) to measure racial preference and racial attitude. Results indicated no relationship between racial group concepts and general or specific self-esteem. Significant grade level differences were found to partially support Nobles' theory. Physical/Appearance esteem (one of the items from the CSEI) was the single best predictor of general self-esteem. (Author/MP)

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Racial Group Concept and Self-Esteem in Black Children

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Abstract

The relationship of racial group concepts (racial preference and racial attitudes) to general and specific self-esteem in black children was examined. The study also attempted to validate the belief of Nobles (1973) that racial group attitudes influence the Black American's concept of "self." The subjects were 210 black children in grades three to six. A black experimenter administered a variation of the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory to measure general and specific self-esteem and a variation of the PRAM II test to measure racial preference and racial attitude. Results indicated no relationship between racial group concepts and general or specific self-esteem. Significant grade level differences were found to partially support Noble's theory. Physical/Appearance esteem was the single best predictor of general self-esteem.

Racial Group Concept and Self-Esteem in Black Children

Various disciplines of social and behavioral science have investigated the development of self-esteem in black children. Nevertheless, very few studies have accurately assessed the relationship of racial preferences and racial attitudes to self-esteem. Many of the earlier studies were subject to measure only racial preferences and racial attitudes and interpret white preferences and inaccurate skin color perceptions by blacks to imply impaired self-concepts and low self-esteem (Bunton & Weissbach, 1974; Goodman, 1952; Landreth & Johnson, 1968; Rice, Ruiz, & Padilla, 1974). Gordon (1976) reviewed the methodologies in Black self-concept research from 1939-1974. One interesting finding from her study is that during the period from 1939-1953, 67% of the studies reviewed used the forced choice identification as their measurement technique. These forced choice methods involved showing subject dolls, photographs, and puppets, of different racial groups and asking the subjects to express preference. Most of us should be able to recognize these studies as an outgrowth of the old Clark & Clark Doll Test (1940's). There appears to be a construct validity problem here that refers to whether one can assess self-concept by measuring racial preferences. The immediate obvious answer is NO, nevertheless, researchers used this technique for 3-4 decades. Gordon looked at various methodological techniques and the frequency of low self-concept findings and reported that 81% of the studies from 1939-1973 using the preference test found black children with white preferences and subsequently implied low self-concepts. Nevertheless, during

the same time period only 44% of the studies using self-concept scales found blacks with lower self-concepts.

Those studies that have measured both self-esteem and some aspect of racial group concepts (racial preferences, racial identification, or racial attitudes) have reported conflicting findings. Several studies (Butte, 1963; Porter, 1971; Ward & Braun, 1972) have found a positive relationship between self-esteem and racial preference, however, McAdoo (1973, 1978), who studied race attitudes and self-concept in black preschoolers did not. In addition, Rosenberg (1979) found no relationship between the black child's attitudes toward his race and his personal self-esteem which he felt refuted the notion that group rejection could result in black self-hatred.

In order to clarify the relationship between self-esteem and racial attitudes and racial preferences, a theoretical model proposed by Nobles (1973) explaining the concept of self in Black Americans was adopted. Nobles (1973) expanded Mead's (1934) two components of self: the "I" - self-perceptions, and "Me" - internalized attitudes to include the "We", which he defined as internalized perceptions one has towards a group and being part of the group. He felt that the "We" had a significant influence on general self-esteem for Black Americans.

The main purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between racial group concepts (racial preference and racial attitudes) to general and specific self-esteem in black children. General self-esteem refers to one's overall self-evaluation and specific esteem to the internalization of others' positive and negative values and attitudes about physical development and appearance, social interaction, personal characteristics, and academic/school

attitudes. A distinction between general and specific self-esteem has been made by previous researchers (Hare, 1977; Rosenberg & Simmons, 1972). In addition, the study explored the ability of racial group concepts to preduct general self-esteem in an attempt to validate Nobles' notion that group attitudes influence the Black American's concept of "self."

Method

Subjects

The subjects in this study were 210 black male and female children. Forty-seven percent were attending three integrated schools while the remaining 53% attended five desegrated elementary schools in grades three through six, located in a Midwestern college town. There were 83 third and fourth graders with a mean age of 9 years, 6 months and 127 fifth and sixth graders (mean age of 11 years, 1 month). Eighty-six of the children were males while 122 were females. Seventy percent lived in low-income predominantly black neighborhoods.

Measures

Self-esteem was measured by a 53 item test adapted from questions on the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory and Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. Half of the items described positive attributes while the other half described negative attributes of self. There were six items to measure general self-esteem (I feel good about myself, I wish I were different) and the remaining 47 items measured the following four dimensions of specific self-esteem:

Physical/Appearance: My hair is nice. I am good looking.

Social: My friends like my ideas. My family is disappointed in me.

Personal: I worry alot. I stay with something until I finish it.

Academic/School: I am good in my school work. I forget what I learn.

The self-esteem measure was pretested and found to have a split half reliability of .80 and an individual item reliability of .37 as measured by the Kuder-Richardson coefficient.

Racial preferences and racial attitudes were measured by a test modeled after the Preschool Racial Attitude Measure II (Williams, 1971). This test was composed of thirteen black and white illustrated items: six to assess preference for own race, six to assess attitudes about own race and the last item determined the child's racial self-perception. Each illustration displayed a black and white person similar except for color and facial dimensions. Zipitone was used for the coloration of the black figures. A descriptive story including both negative and positive attributes accompanied each illustration.

Procedure

The black children who participated in this study were taken from their classrooms and assembled in groups varying in size from 10 to 20 children. They were tested by a black female experimenter and research assistant. The self-esteem measure was administered first with the items given orally to the third and fourth graders, followed by the Racial Attitude and Racial Preference Measure. The experimenter read aloud the twelve statements accompanying each illustration instructing the students to answer by marking one of the figures in their booklets.

Results

A ceiling effect was established in the area of racial self-perception. There was 100% identification with the black choices as the child that looked most like their racial group.

Product moment correlation coefficients were calculated for all variables. (see Table 1). Racial preference and racial attitude were significantly correlated with each other. ($r = .48$, $p < .01$). The four specific esteem scores were correlated highly with total specific esteem, each other, and general self-esteem. Physical/Appearance was most highly correlated ($r = .49$, $p < .001$) and academic/school esteem the least correlated ($r = .25$, $p < .05$) with general self-esteem. The racial group concepts (racial preference and racial attitude) were unrelated to self-esteem (specific and general.)

The raw data were dichotomized into high and low groups and separate analyses of variance were performed on the general self-esteem scores by grade level with specific esteem, racial preference, and racial attitude as independent variables. Specific esteem was the only significant main effect for the fifth-sixth grade group, $F(1, 119) = 20.39$, $p < .001$; however, specific esteem, $F(1, 75) = 3.86$, $p < .05$, and the three-way interaction between specific esteem, racial preference, and racial attitude were significantly related to the general self-esteem scores, $F(1, 75) = 4.41$, $p < .03$ for the third-fourth grade.

In order to assess the ability of the racial group concepts to predict the level of general self-esteem separate multiple regression analyses with general self-esteem as the criterion variable and one of the four specific self-esteem scores, racial preference and racial attitude as predictor variables for the third-fourth grade were performed (see Table 2). The most significant group of predictor variables were racial preference, racial attitude, and physical/appearance esteem ($R^2 = .33$, $p < .01$). The only single predictor of general self-esteem was physical/appearance esteem, $t(79) = 5.83$, $p < .05$. Social esteem ($R^2 = .15$, $p < .01$) and personal esteem ($R^2 = .01$, $p < .05$) when grouped with racial preference and racial attitude were also

significant predictor variables, nevertheless they accounted for very little of the total variance in the general self-esteem scores. T-tests revealed that social-esteem, $t(79) = 3.22$, $p < .05$, and personal esteem, $t(79) = 2.17$, $p < .05$, were significant single predictors of general self-esteem while academic/school esteem was not. To further investigate the strength of the specific esteem variables as predictors of general self-esteem, regression coefficients were computed with the four specific esteem scores as predictor variables and general self-esteem the criterion variable for the total population (see Table 3). As expected, the specific esteem variables were predictors of general self-esteem $R^2 = .28$, $p < .001$, nevertheless, the only single predictor of general self-esteem was physical/appearance esteem $t(205) = 5.88$, $p < .001$.

Discussion

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship of racial group concepts (racial attitudes and racial preferences) to general and specific self-esteem in Black children. The data indicate that no apparent relationship exists, a finding which is supportive of McAdoo (1973, 1978) and Rosenberg (1979). McAdoo (1973,1978) reported black children holding negative own-race attitudes and positive self-concepts and concluded that black children learn to compartmentalize their racial attitudes and prevent them from influencing self-evaluation. The present results raise serious questions concerning the construct validity of instruments employed by previous researchers who utilized racial preference or racial attitude measures to make implications about self-concept or self-esteem (Bunton & Weissbach, 1974; Rice, Ruiz, & Padilla, 1974).

The present findings are also contrary to the "black self-hatred doctrine" posed so frequently by many previous social scientists (see Baldwin, 1979) by providing empirical data to negate the belief that Blacks who internalize negative racial group attitudes from the larger white society would inevitably possess negative self-evaluations.

A secondary purpose of this study was to assess the validity of Nobles' (1973) notion that racial group attitudes influence the Black American's concept of "self" by determining if racial group concepts would predict general self-esteem. The data indicated that neither racial preference nor racial attitude were significant predictors of general self-esteem.

In summary, the present results suggest that accurate implications about specific or general self-esteem can not be attained by research that measures only racial attitudes or preferences. The present results indicate that additional research in this area is needed in order to determine if age influences the impact of racial group concepts on general self-esteem. The findings of physical/appearance as the best predictor of general self-esteem suggests that racial physiognomy may be a crucial variable in self-esteem development for Black children.

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Table 1

Correlation coefficients of specific esteem, racial preference, racial attitude, and four subscores of specific esteem test

	Specific Esteem	Racial Preference	Racial Attitude	General Self-Esteem	Physical Esteem	Personal Esteem	Social Esteem	School Esteem
Specific Esteem	1.00	.05	.02	.43***	.62***	.85***	.83***	.69***
Racial Preference	.08	1.00	.55***	.18	.09	.07	.06	-.08
Racial Attitude	.04	.48***	1.00	.01	-.03	.06	.12	-.16
General Self-Esteem	.48***	.03	.01	1.00	.58	.24*	.33**	.11
Physical Esteem	.68***	.11	-.01	.49***	1.00	.33**	.33**	.20
Personal Esteem	.82***	.05	.03	.35***	.37***	1.00	.68***	.51***
Social Esteem	.83***	.05	.08	.36***	.42***	.62***	1.00	.49***
School Esteem	.71***	.04	.01	.25*	.30**	.46***	.48***	1.00

Note: Correlations above the diagonal are for the third-fourth grade while those below are for total population.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 2

Regression coefficients and multiple correlation coefficients for general self-esteem with racial preference, racial attitude and four specific esteem subtests as predictor variables, third-fourth grade

Predictor Variable	Beta	t	R^2
Racial Preference	.15	1.39	
Racial Attitude	-.05	-.48	
Physical/Appearance	.54	5.83*	
			.33**
Racial Preference	.22	1.75	
Racial Attitude	-.12	-.94	
Personal	.23	2.17*	
			.09**
Racial Preference	.24	1.93	
Racial Attitude	-.15	-1.24	
Social	.34	3.22*	
			.15**
Racial Preference	.23	1.80	
Racial Attitude	-.09	-.71	
Academic/School	.12	1.05	
			.05

*$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

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Table 3

Regression coefficients and multiple correlation coefficients for general self-esteem with four specific esteem subtests as predictor variables

Predictor Variable	Beta	t	R^2
Physical/Appearance	.39	5.88***	
Personal	.12	1.56	
Social	.11	1.32	
Academic/School	.02	.26	
			.28***

*** $p < .001$

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